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United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations

Letter dated 19 October 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the Prague Declaration, adopted at the Fifth Forum 2000 Conference, held in Prague, Czech Republic, from 14 to 17 October 2001 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 25.

(*Signed*) Hynek **Kmoníček**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

01-59687 (E) 231001

Annex to the letter dated 19 October 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Prague Declaration

Approved by the Fifth Forum 2000 Conference

Prague, Czech Republic,

17 October 2001

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization, as both a process and an already existing condition of the world, typifies the development of civilization at the beginning of the Third Millennium. Its powerful and omnipresent dynamic has undoubtedly been responsible for many achievements of benefit to humanity but it is also viewed by many as a threat in almost every area of human endeavor. The promise of universal well-being and prosperity, which lies at the heart of the modern age, has turned out to be an illusion. The vast majority of the world's population suffer from profound economic inequality, and are psychologically and culturally marginalized in the global society now coming into being, and in some cases are also marginalized in the societies of their own countries. In spite of the unprecedented flourishing of political institutions they lose control over their own destinies. The billions of dollars traded daily, the wide availability of health care and three decades of heightened concern about the ecological aspects of development have not protected the majority of humanity from the growth of every kind of hardship, including poverty, disease, and environmental degradation. The more dominant is the economic and technological globalization of humankind, the harder it is to control it by democratic political means. This is alarming. So far humanity lacks the courage and the will to choose the path of cooperation. The social basis and moral justification of globalization are increasingly called in question, on the grounds that apart from its positive aspects it threatens to unify culture and rob the world of its complexity and variety, as well as to heighten inter-cultural confrontation and impede mutual understanding. Equally imperiled are peaceful co-existence among nations and the very survival of humankind.

The Prague Approach

Every autumn for the past five years people have gathered at Prague Castle united, in spite of their many differences, by a common desire to seek and find answers to these

questions. They have included distinguished world figures – Nobel laureates, prominent politicians, influential intellectuals and academics, artists and writers, as well as representatives of different world religions and spiritual currents. The Forum 2000 conferences have sought to explore less obvious, more controversial and profounder aspects of global development. Along the way, we believe, a unique and relevant approach to globalization has emerged in Prague, characterized in particular by a focus on spiritual, cultural and religious values. The Prague approach broadly reflects the critical spirit and intellectual tradition of this city located at the crossroads of European history, a city which emitted reforming ideas and spiritual impulses.

The series of Forum 2000 conferences has come full cycle. Its participants would like to share their conclusions with international decision-makers and those who have greatest influence on public opinion and therefore turn with particular urgency to politicians and religious leaders. But we address ourselves also to scientists and business people, creative artists and people in the media, and above all to young people everywhere. We appeal to all people who are not indifferent to the fate of the world to give responsible thought to the problems we seek to outline in this Prague Declaration.

2. PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES

The Forum 2000 Conferences held in the years 1997-2001 highlighted a number of serious problems facing the world on the threshold of the new millennium. Most of them were related to at least one of several aspects of globalization and sought to indicate the direction that reforms might take:

Ethical Minimum

The sheer extent and variety of violence that occurred in the 20th Century is something to be borne constantly in mind in the 21st Century. It would be useful to assert a global ethical minimum reflecting humanity's fundamental moral principles

that must be respected. It would comprise the injunction to treat every human being humanely as well as the golden rule governing relations between individuals and between human communities: "Do unto others as you would have done unto you; refrain from doing to others what you would not like them to do to you." Heightened ethical consciousness should help alleviate enormous human suffering, halt the degradation of the natural environment and limit the dramatic extinction of species and cultures. Global resources are allocated very unequally and inadequately. Therefore perhaps the greatest global challenges of all today is how to divert resources from arms and the drugs trade, and from excessive luxury and material consumption into efforts to combat hunger and disease, prevent violent conflict and solve problems associated with global warming and natural disasters.

Global Democracy

The richness of life on Earth is demonstrated, inter alia, by the myriad ways in which human affairs are administered. It is crucial to protect the plurality of forms of governance and political participation. However, certain universal standards - perhaps best expressed in the concept of human rights - must be asserted unequivocally and the widest international support must be won for them. No human society or government is perfect but a clear criterion must be clearly enunciated in order to differentiate between democratic institutions, good governance and open societies on the one hand, and those forms of government that violate human dignity, discriminate against minorities and do not respect the rule of law, on the other. The challenge of global democracy is one of finding instruments and institutions that will equally protect globally shared values and local differences.

The Political Effectiveness of the Global Economy

Global capitalism is the source of both growing wealth and growing tensions in the world. It would be impossible to maintain the legitimacy of global markets were they to benefit only one fifth of the global population while exploiting the natural and

human resources of the remaining four fifths. Unregulated competition and capital mobility eventually cause harm to individuals and societies. In this they represent the other extreme from totalitarian and command economies. Major challenges to the global economy - such as stimulating efficiency and development while protecting the losers and the environment - are not solely an economic problem, but have to be addressed by social and political institutions as well. Effective policies must be matched by political foresight and moral responsibility.

Local Identity, Social Capital and Human Development

The ideal global economy is not one that is strictly regulated, but one that strengthens and enhances positive forms of local identities, increases social capital and develops human capacities and opportunities. The global economy must never be allowed to elude human control and for this reason its destructive effects must be offset by sustainable local development. The challenge lies in finding a balance between capital investments and investments in education, between comparative advantage and support for civil society, and between the role of state and the development of private activity.

3. WHAT TO NURTURE

Throughout the Forum 2000 series, the participants were involved in a search for values common to all world religions, cultures and communities, values that could become the core of global ethical codex, a common spiritual ground for humanity. It is unacceptable that the form of individual national societies should be determined by uncontrolled economic development and particular political conditions. Greater efforts should be made to nurture the real sources of values, the spiritual foundations of civilization, and to seek and assert a common ethical codex and a global concept of human rights, and on this basis create and cultivate political institutions aimed at regulating economic and technological globalization.

Article 1

Solidarity, Equality and Inclusion

In view of the present unequal distribution of resources and economic benefits there needs to be a global system of solidarity to protect the basic rights of all those who cannot fully participate, let alone compete, in international competition. The right to minimum and equal human treatment and the right of people to participate in matters having an impact on themselves should be cornerstones of global civilization in the 21st Century. This applies particularly to the position of women also, not least, those facing abuse in their own families and homes, which was movingly described in the course of our meetings.

Article 2

Tolerance, Understanding and Protection of Difference

The diversity of global civilization is one of its greatest assets - a pool of experience, knowledge and alternatives. Protecting different forms of governance and cultural expression as well as different religious faiths and lifestyles especially those that are small, weak or in the minority - is therefore an imperative for global society. The right to be different should apply everywhere as long as it does not open the way to intolerance or violation of other human rights.

Article 3

Respect and Responsibility

All life on the planet, including human existence, is grounded in a higher order transcending our lives. As individuals, communities and societies, we should respect it and act accordingly as responsible custodians, overcoming the temptations of individual or group selfishness. Respect for humanity, for every human being, and for human life at every stage of development, as well as responsibility for the environment, are key preconditions for the sustainability, continuity and humanity of global civilization.

4. WHAT TO CHANGE

The values set out above are in no way new to humankind. Indeed, many of them are already referred to – albeit inadequately – in important multilateral conventions, various solemn documents and international legislation. However, many of them are not matched by adequate and functioning institutions. It has been the ongoing effort of Forum 2000 to define a global institutional framework that would allow these values to be translated readily into practical instruments, to overcome any possible internal conflicts and to set global priorities.

Article 4

United Nations

The largest and most representative of all global institutions is still lagging behind global realities. Voting in the Security Council still tends to reflect the distribution of power in the mid 20th century rather than the present need for effective global dialogue, universal participation, empowerment and a new ethos. Reform of the UN should be also aimed at creating a UN body to deal on a permanent basis with the environmental crisis. In the new century the UN should be more flexible and effective and able to take more rapid and appropriate action. This is the only way to enhance its authority.

Article 5

International Law

Although many global agreements have been signed and ratified, only a few of them have been implemented. International law needs to be reformed in order to overcome its volatile, inconsistent and non-binding nature and introduce effective, transparent and equitable mechanisms of enforcement. Just as certain limitations on individual

freedoms and privacy help ensure greater security, so also there must be limitations on national sovereignty if international law is to be effective. Only then can global values prevail over particular interests and short-term considerations.

Article 6

Bretton Woods Institutions

The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization are often the object of criticism, rejection and dramatic protests. These institutions have major potential to promote development where it is most needed and to cooperate in the creation of global economic, legal and ethical norms and their implementation. However in order to realize this potential they need to become more open, transparent, representative and more responsible in the wider context of their activities, in line with the great power and influence they wield. We therefore appeal to governments to exercise pressure on those institutions along these lines and also call for a more objective attitude on the part of the media, a more constructive and above all non-violent approach on the part of critics and demonstrators and greater commitment and creative thinking on the part of diplomats and economists.

Article 7

World Religions and Churches

The multireligious assemblies that have been an important part of Forum 2000 conferences have demonstrated that representatives of religions and churches are capable of seeking what unites them and valuing it more highly than what divides them. Religions hold great potential for the future of mankind; they can play an important role in reconciling different cultures, promoting a universal ethic and working together to create a moral climate in a globalized world. However under certain circumstances and in particular forms, religious ideals and symbols can be misused into order to escalate conflicts between minorities and larger groups and communities. We therefore appeal to believers of various religions and their leaders to

support all activities aimed at promoting dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation among people and breaking down the barriers between individual religions and spiritual currents, and to distance themselves from all expressions of intolerance and violence.

Article 8

Transnational Corporations

Global trade accounts for an ever-growing proportion of material wealth and the transnational corporations are primary carriers of growth, innovation and creativity. In many areas there is no one else to provide people with needed jobs, capital and technology. Economic globalization gives huge power and influence to multinational companies. However, their operations under global principles often disregard the local context, harm the environment and directly or indirectly violate human rights. If companies are to become responsible global actors, values - in the form of moral codices, social and environmental audits etc. - should play a greater role in their behavior.

Article 9

Education and the Role of the Nation State

Despite the continuing process of international political integration, nation states are major actors in international affairs. Most states today have democratically elected governments. The role of the state in the era of globalization should not be reduced, but rather transformed to reflect common global values. States should create a legal environment for non-governmental organizations and private companies agencies to act as freely as possible and devote maximum resources to supporting education as basic conditions for a future of human dignity, as well as maintaining infrastructure and communication, and guaranteeing security and international cooperation. Regulation and enforcement should still be the state's ultimate responsibility.

Article 10

Basic Education for All

The United Nations, together with other international organizations and member states, should realize a worldwide program to guarantee free basic education to all children of the world as one of the main conditions for overcoming ignorance, want, and the terrorism that feeds on them.

Article 11

Responsible Independent Media

A particular responsibility is born by the mass media to ensure that they do not perpetuate and disseminate false information, stereotypes about other religions or ethnic groups, or a fascination with violence. This applies especially to media reporting in one cultural or religious community about another.

Article 12

Global Civil Society

Civil society has a key role in the transformation of global values into effective instruments. A vibrant, independent civil society should operate at local, national and global level. It plays an indispensable role in creating the vital fabric of relationships between morality, politics and economics, between markets and states, between the global and the local, i.e. at all levels and between them.

5. HOW TO CONDUCT A DIALOGUE

The enormous relevance of critical discussion of global problems has been acknowledged throughout the five-year conference series. The Forum 2000 conferences constitute a distinct experiment in terms of their scope, their informal

atmosphere and the range of participants. Not only have they been an exercise in analyzing global problems, but equally - and perhaps more importantly – they have been an exercise in conducting a global dialogue on complex issues among people of many different views. This experience of creating a culture of sensitive but non-trivial global dialogue is an important part of the Forum 2000 message. The following principles should underlie the creation of a culture of meaningful and sustainable global discourse:

Article 13

The Culture of Dialogue

The way discussions are conducted is as important as the topics addressed in the debates. Unless others are accorded a respectful hearing, unless the legitimacy of people's otherness, cultural differences and the variety of political forms is sincerely acknowledged, no global debate can have any meaning or achieve results. In the case of many complex topics or when there are major cultural differences or differences of opinion, establishing a culture of dialogue may be the only positive achievement for some time. However, we firmly believe that the experience of dialogue can be a solution and the path towards creating a culture of relationships, a kind of global civilization that would turn out planet into a safe and decent home for all its inhabitants.

Article 14

The Broadest Possible Representation

Inadequate opportunity to participate in such a dialogue and be regarded as an equal partner breeds frustration, a sense of injustice and distrust. When voices are ignored they find undesirable ways of drawing attention!

However, it is not in the power of any conference, not even Forum 2000, to make room for every voice that is raised around in the world. Nonetheless it is necessary to go on looking for ways to open the debating chamber to the voices of those who have

so far been disadvantaged or discriminated against in some way and thus marginalized in the global dialogue.

Article 15

Plurality of Opinions

To strive for uniformity of views is not only misleading, but also breeds false cognitive - and hence moral and institutional - dominance. Representatives of different views – of more critical, non-conforming and disquieting attitudes –are essential for discovering global alternatives, for faithfully representing the global reality and building a credible global dialogue. Slow, complicated, costly and painful as such debates are bound to be, they establish a globally indispensable, long-term process of mutual learning, foster a culture of respect, promote a culture of respect and an atmosphere of fairness.

Article 16

Helping to Build a Global Society

Genuine dialogue is impossible in a situation in which one of the participants dominates the rest. It requires both honesty and caution. Global alternatives and viable solutions cannot be discovered unless invalid assumptions are questioned, false logic is challenged, particular interests are identified, and oversimplifications and improper generalizations resisted. The attitudes of all of us are strongly influenced by our experience and our particular vantage point. Through mutual discourse we must constantly seek and test the concepts, strategies and approaches that stand the best chance of becoming universal values and generally acceptable rules. Without a culture of global dialogue all attempts at cultivating a global society will come to naught.

6. AN APPEAL TO THE WORLD PUBLIC

The Prague Declaration covers a complex range of global issues and addresses a wide

array of institutions and decision-makers. It is they who bear the greatest responsibility. However, the Forum 2000 conferences have been characterized by the informal and personal character of the debates. In that spirit of openness and trust we would therefore like to offer the Prague Declaration to all people of goodwill on our planet. Only when all human beings start to realize more fully their shared responsibility for our shared world can our belief be justified that what is hopeful in today's world will one day prevail over what threatens us.